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## Armed violence and poverty in Sierra Leone: a case study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative

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Centre for  
International Cooperation  
and Security

## **Armed violence and poverty in Sierra Leone**

A case study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative  
March 2005

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MAKING KNOWLEDGE WORK

## The Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has commissioned the Centre for International Cooperation and Security (CICS) at Bradford University to carry out research to promote understanding of how and when poverty and vulnerability is exacerbated by armed violence. This study programme, which forms one element in a broader “Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative”, aims to provide the full documentation of that correlation which DFID feels is widely accepted but not confirmed. It also aims to analyse the **processes** through which such impacts occur and the **circumstances** which exacerbate or moderate them. In addition it has a practical policy-oriented purpose and concludes with programming and policy recommendations to donor government agencies.

This report on Sierra Leone is one of 13 case studies (all of the case studies are available at [www.bradford.ac.uk/cics](http://www.bradford.ac.uk/cics)). This research draws upon secondary data sources including existing research studies, reports and evaluations commissioned by operational agencies, and early warning and survey data where this has been available. These secondary sources have been complemented by primary research interviews with government officers, aid policymakers and practitioners, researchers and members of the local population. The author would like to thank Tunde Zack-Williams for comments made on an earlier draft. The analysis and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views or policy of DFID or the UK government.

## **Executive summary**

This study examines the impact of armed violence and small arms and light weapons (SALW) on poverty in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone was selected as an internal conflict case study for comparison with other forms of armed violence analysed in the other AVPI case studies. Sierra Leone also represents an interesting case study in that it has been subject to extensive external programming to address SALW possession/usage, and also some atypical outcomes that resulted from armed violence and SALW usage.

### **Armed violence context**

The conflict involved the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) movement, civil defence forces (CDF), the national army, neighbouring countries and also the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the UN, the UK and mercenary/private security forces. SALW played a significant part in the duration and intensity of the conflict – for example enabling the RUF to sustain the conflict for 11 years with only a few thousand combatants. However, traditional weapons and implements also played a significant part in the conflict being used for community protection, for example, and many deaths/atrocities were committed with them rather than SALW. Further, most civilians did not acquire SALW during the conflict.

### **SALW possession**

Sierra Leone prior to the conflict did not have a weapons problem nor a gun culture. During the conflict unknown quantities of guns passed through the country. Weapons were supplied by and through neighbouring countries. Western governments and arms dealers also supplied combatants. However, this has not resulted in widespread weapons display or possession post-conflict. Most civilians did not acquire SALW during the conflict. Extensive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and SALW programming collected some weapons (over 70,000 in the formal DDR process) but arms caches, domestic weapons, weapons for sale, and easily accessible regional supplies mean ready access to weapons exists. Arms embargoes proved ineffective. Nevertheless, the carrying, display, or the use of arms, and the incidence of armed criminality have not risen significantly post-conflict, and there is an aversion to guns amongst much of the population.

### **Insecurity and SALW**

The possession/use of SALW created high levels of rural and urban insecurity, particularly in the absence of state protection, which had drastic impoverishing effects. The RUF typically used SALW to lay siege to communities, to extort goods and labour from civilians, to seize recruits and for plunder and pillaging to sustain the conflict and for personal enrichment. They were also used for revenge, humiliation and other 'psychological' purposes, especially against women and children. The CDF, which had fewer SALW, tended to use them for community defence, to establish control over communities, and for combating RUF, as well as personal and group enrichment. While army units and ECOMOG forces used SALW to fight the rebels and sometimes to rob and intimidate communities and also for personal and group enrichment. The impact of these uses on Sierra Leone was catastrophic with many communities becoming totally insecure with few supplies coming in, few viable livelihoods, food shortages, and no form of protection. However, in some communities CDF and government forces managed to maintain forms of community security and development. And ultimately, it was the use of SALW and other

weapons by the CDF, and the Kamajors in particular, and external forces, that enabled the RUF to be defeated and armed violence terminated.

## **Negative poverty impacts**

### **Economic activities**

Declining GDP and other macro economic indicators. The impact of armed violence and SALW usage on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can be directly traced to conflict incidences. The coup by SALW armed army elements in May 1997, for example, led to real GDP plunging 20% in 1997. Retarded GDP damaged the government's capacity to deliver social services. In periods of relative peace GDP rose. However, GDP has yet to fully recover. Further, key industries on which Sierra Leone depended were damaged by armed violence. The RUF closures of mines and industries at gunpoint also impacted directly upon the rural poor who were dependent on them for income.

### **Infrastructure destruction and trade**

Destruction of houses and robbery impoverished most civilians. The majority of householders had their houses destroyed or were evicted at gunpoint in conflict zones and they lost many possessions. Displacement often made civilians dependent on subsistence strategies. Many households are yet to recover.

Sieges impoverished communities. SALW-armed rebels cut off the supplies to many towns and villages by shooting or intimidating lorry drivers seeking to keep roads open and feed starving civilians, or by burning their lorries. Many people in besieged towns were impoverished or even starved and communities have yet to fully recover. Many lorry drivers lost their lorries, their means of livelihoods, and are without work.

Patterns of trade/transportation negatively changed. The violence changed trading patterns in that communities and markets that formerly had trading links could no longer trade because of the dangers of armed violence. Post-conflict the old patterns of trade have not necessarily been renewed.

### **Food security and agriculture**

Lost livelihoods. Farmers lost their livelihoods as they were too fearful of armed combatants to farm, or left their homes to join the CDF. Further, they were often robbed and their equipment destroyed.

Declines in nutrition. SALW attacks on civilians in towns such as Makeni and Bo forced many to flee into the bush and to survive on 'bush' products. Many suffered from malnutrition or were ill and unable to work or support their families.

Changed patterns of agriculture. Rice farmers risked being shot, mutilated or abducted and output slumped. Limited farming of root crops took its place, but this was less nutritious. Following the conflict, rice production still has not recovered and prices have rocketed.

### **Social Services**

Destruction of supplies/infrastructure. Schools and hospitals were destroyed by SALW-armed rebels curtailing or seriously hampering the delivery of social services.

Education opportunities curtailed/lost employment opportunities. Many children and youths missed the key years of their education either because they were combatants or they were prevented from attending schools because of armed violence. And many

have been unable to find employment post-conflict, in part, because they are frequently perceived as unemployable.

Social service professionals impoverished. The shooting, mutilation and intimidation of teachers and others in the social services reduced many to the level of the long-term poor.

Declines in health. Disease accelerated with the deepening of armed violence with no real provision of drugs or safe water. Population movements, over-crowding, and poor sanitary conditions stimulated by armed violence further exacerbated disease outbreaks. The poor health of many Sierra Leoneans pushed, and continues to push, many further into poverty.

### **Social capital**

Social capital declined damaging support networks. Violence committed with SALW and other weapons within both urban and rural settings seriously undermined trust, reciprocity and networks. Social transactions that traditionally provided some sort of safety net for the impoverished were damaged. Neighbours robbed each other, many poor took the opportunity to rob the rich, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms were eroded in places such as Freetown in 1997-8 where armed violence became routine in certain areas of the city. Declines in social capital seem to have hampered recovery.

### **Vulnerable groups**

Women impoverished. Women were targeted by armed combatants and attacked, raped, used as sex slaves or spies, and taken as 'bush wives', among other things. Once raped they often suffered poor health and were frequently unable to re-marry into the community. Many became dependent upon petty trading to survive and slipped deeper into poverty.

Children, youth and disabled disadvantaged. Many disabled were left to fend for themselves during the conflict and sunk further into poverty. Youths sometimes managed to enrich themselves during the conflict through armed robbery, but this has not generally been sustained following the end of the conflict and sustainable employment is elusive. Most child ex-combatants are now working in the diamond mine fields of Kono or Tongo.

### **Armed robbery/criminality**

Civilians impoverished/some combatants enriched. A goal of armed violence was to plunder and civilians were robbed of their possessions at gunpoint. Government buildings were also looted or destroyed. Some combatants, government officials, and outsiders with a stake in the conflict enriched themselves and have not subsequently been called to account.

Post-conflict concerns. There is a creeping concern about security in some districts where drugs and anti-social behaviour are increasing. And outbreaks of armed robbery and violence by impoverished individuals in some communities are already on the increase.

### **Population movements**

Movement from rural to urban areas. Many of the displaced moved from the countryside to urban areas but have failed to find sustainable livelihoods. Their absence has also impacted upon rural communities denying them skills and expertise and adding to impoverishment. Civilians who fled Sierra Leone for neighbouring

countries have frequently been abused and have found it hard to find viable livelihoods on returning.

### **Other SALW-related impacts**

Community protection/development. SALW possession enabled some communities to defend themselves. Ultimately, it was the use of SALW and other weapons by the CDF and external forces, including the British, that enabled the RUF to be defeated and armed violence terminated. Further, in some CDF-held areas SALW protection enabled livelihoods to be maintained.

Absence of a post-conflict weapons culture. A consequence of SALW usage has been the emergence in civil society of an aversion to weapons. The display, possession and usage of SALW is generally regarded as unacceptable. This potentially has reined in armed violence and its capacity to disrupt recovery. Sierra Leone has not become a militarised society/state.

No significant rises in post-conflict armed violence. The use/possession of SALW during the conflict has not led to significant surges in post-conflict armed violence, unlike many other conflicts, despite rising poverty. Key factors explaining this may include a reaction/revulsion to armed violence in Sierra Leone, increased sensitisation by civil society on the dangers of SALW, and also the presence of international military forces and a strengthened police.

Some groups/individuals became less poor. Changing trading patterns benefited some traders. They shifted trade to neighbouring countries, for example. This has brought financial benefits. Employment in service industries in Freetown has increased. However, there are fears this may not be sustainable as internationals leave Sierra Leone.

### **Implications for programming**

Shortfalls in programming. The programming undertaken in Sierra Leone to address weapons issues during the conflict did not fully collect SALW or prevent renewed outbreaks of conflict until late on. Weapon supplies into Sierra Leone were not curtailed, and remain largely open. Neither have appropriate or sustainable livelihoods being found for a number of ex-combatants. Vulnerable groups were also neglected. Civilian concerns tended to be neglected in favour of those of ex-combatants. Subsequent follow-up SALW programming has addressed some of these concerns. However, the underlying causes of conflict that underpinned weapons acquisition, such as youth marginalisation, poor governance, remain despite being targeted by developmental programming. Nevertheless, an international presence still underpins security in Sierra Leone and acts as deterrent to weapons possession, display and usage. Whether non-violence can be maintained when the international presence diminishes or terminates remains open to question.

Responding to SALW possession/usage. The experience of Sierra Leone suggests that the following elements may usefully be integrated into future programming:

- *Community security and confidence-building.* Unprotected communities particularly suffered the consequences of SALW and were impoverished. This implies the need for appropriately trained police and army contingents (through SSR) that fulfil their duty to protect civilians and communities and that are deployed nationwide. In Sierra Leone this has been a post-conflict priority, but has not as yet been achieved.
- *International/regional SALW controls.* Improved international and regional controls over licit and illicit arms transfers to conflict zones.

- *Improved border patrols to combat illicit trafficking of SALW.*
- *Comprehensive regional/localised arms collection.* The latter needs to particularly target civilian weapons. Regionally co-ordinated arms collection programmes are vital to avert the intensification or potential resurgence of armed violence through intra-regional arms circulations.
- *More targeted interventions to secure livelihoods for ex-combatants.* Opportunities/needs assessments are particularly important in relation to this.
- *Build upon civil society capacities to reverse gun cultures and the militarization of communities/societies.* Civil society and locals have the best understanding of how armed violence comes about and the capacity to engage with it through traditional mechanisms. This needs to be built upon. In Sierra Leone, community re-acceptance of ex-combatants has been high, despite the atrocities that have been committed. DDR and other forms of programming still do not fully engage with the capacities of locals to reverse the militarization of communities, although arms for development programming is making progress in this area.
- *Identify and target vulnerable groups.* Vulnerable groups such as the disabled, children, and women were not adequately provided for in much DDR and associated programming. They continue to be disadvantaged three years after the ending of the conflict and need continuing or further support.
- *National legislation/small arms regulation.* Further measures are required in this area to ensure that controls on small arms keep pace with potentially rising levels of arms criminality and outbreaks of armed violence.
- *Root causes of weapons acquisition need to be addressed.* Sierra Leone shows that the targeting of conflict triggers, such as poor governance and exclusion, are vital.
- *Promoting participatory programming.* In Sierra Leone, much SALW/DDR and other programming has typically been externally-driven. This has contributed to the government failing to take responsibility and ownership for taking Sierra Leone forward in addressing armed violence and poverty issues. At the same time, Sierra Leone institutions have not generally proved effective in taking the lead on this. Nevertheless, participatory programming is vital. Civil society organisations may be a good point of entry to enhance participatory programming.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Case study rationale

SALW in the possession of certain individuals, groups and militaries have the capacity to create or contribute to intense insecurity and violence and to damage development and impoverish. However, documenting and demonstrating SALW impacts and the precise ways and processes through which they create insecurity and impoverish, is an area where there has been only limited policy and research work. Further, linking this to programming and seeking to establish how SALW and armed violence impacts might be alleviated, mitigated, or prevented through appropriate and timely initiatives that take into account armed violence similarly has not been fully thought through.

This case study, in common with other AVPI case studies, seeks through amassing data through field and desk work to start to address some of these gaps in knowledge and policy with the objective of arriving at new understandings of the impacts of armed violence and SALW on poverty. This case study examines the recent conflict and the post-conflict phases in Sierra Leone – selected as an indicative study of an African civil war – and seeks to establish whether in Sierra Leone SALW possession/usage and armed violence have had the types of negative impacts that recent research and policy work suggests occurs when SALW are introduced into conflictual environments. Other case studies in the AVPI examine differing contexts of armed violence (such as criminal gangs in urban settings) to see if they arrive at similar or differing conclusions.

### 1.2 Why do SALW represent a security/poverty challenge?

Policy and research work in the field of SALW is relatively new. SALW only became an articulated and mainstreamed area of research and policy in the mid-1990s following the ending of the Cold War when major weapons systems – such as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and tanks and aircraft – were seen as the prime focus of international attention and SALW of secondary interest. Further, it has been only in the past few years that SALW has started to be looked at as a development as well as a security challenge.

Notwithstanding this, preliminary research and data in this area has emerged and recent analysis of SALW tends to coalesce around a set of generally-accepted assumptions, not least that SALW create patterns of insecurity which have negative direct and indirect impacts on development and in turn on poverty. SALW are seen as presenting a particular challenge in that they are said to play a significant role in triggering, compounding, and lengthening the lethality, scale, and consequences of armed conflict and social violence.<sup>1</sup> The UN Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms in its 1997 Report noted that the availability of these weapons contributes towards exacerbating conflicts by increasing the lethality and duration of violence, by encouraging a violent rather than a peaceful resolution of differences, and by generating a vicious circle of insecurity, which in turn leads to a greater demand for,

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, August 2001, p. 8.

and use of, small arms.<sup>2</sup> It is suggested that SALW have strong social ramifications and make the ability to kill, more than ever before, a utilitarian act, restrained neither by age or gender.<sup>3</sup> This leads to the militarisation of society and the acceptance of weapons as a normal part of life and of violent conflict as an everyday occurrence.<sup>4</sup>

These ramifications in terms of insecurity are, in part, said to stem from the technical characteristics of SALW which are:

- easily concealed;
- cheap and easy to acquire;
- easily used by non-expert civilians and groups;
- more deadly than other readily available weapons (such as clubs and knives);
- designed to have lethal killing capacity including the means to kill quickly at a distance, with little strength, determination or effort.

SALW-induced insecurity and armed violence is said to contribute negatively to the:

- erosion of social capital;
- disruption of economic activities;
- reductions in revenue and savings;
- the diminishing of access to social services, which are also likely to decline in quality;
- a rise in armed criminality;
- an environment where external humanitarian and developmental assistance is likely to be impeded.<sup>5</sup>

These, combined with additional hypotheses internally-generated within the AVPI, will be utilised as the indicators and baselines for the purposes of analysis in this case study.

### **1.3 Why Sierra Leone?**

Sierra Leone was selected as a SALW case study for the following reasons. First, the conflict in Sierra Leone (see Box 1, page 9, for a brief description of the conflict) has indicative characteristics of internal conflicts not only in Africa but globally, such as: a weak state, external regional and international intervention, impoverishment, inequality, poor governance, and a rebel movement that sought to overthrow existing structures and the government through the use of SALW and armed violence. This may allow the findings to have generic relevance in other internal conflicts and post-conflict contexts where donors are engaged in addressing armed violence and its impacts.

Second, Sierra Leone has been the target for extensive developmental programming seeking directly or indirectly to deal with the consequences of armed violence and SALW possession and usage both during and following the conflict. This provides a basis for the case study to reflect on the extent to which armed violence and SALW

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<sup>2</sup> Michael T. Klare, 1999, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Louise, March 1995, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Louise, March 1995, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> See Small Arms Survey, 2003, Chapter 4, especially p. 131. And Muggah and Berman, July 2001.

have been factored into and dealt with in an effective manner in programming, both in terms of stand-alone SALW-related programmes, and through poverty reduction programming more broadly.

Third, considerable numbers of SALW were fed into Sierra Leone as part of a deliberate process of igniting the conflict, sustaining it, and at the same time for defending the state and to avert the rebels taking control of Sierra Leone. However, Sierra Leone did not suffer the numbers of weapons that were inserted into other African 'Cold War' conflicts such as Angola, Somalia and Mozambique.

Fourth, sufficient data is available from Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other international organisations on SALW and developmental indicators to make some reasonably informed assumptions as to the impact of SALW, although there are still gaps in data and knowledge.

Fifth, initial desk research and prior field research undertaken prior to the AVPI suggested that there were some unusual outcomes associated with armed violence in Sierra Leone, such as the seeming development of an antipathy to SALW display, possession and usage across broad swathes of society following the conflict, and few signs of significantly rising incidences of armed violence post-2002. However, it was also apparent that although Sierra Leone on the face of it presents a picture of a largely gun-free post-conflict society, the capacity for a renewal of supply appears to be disturbingly straightforward; not least through hidden arms in Sierra Leone and regional networks.

Last, a year after the end of the conflict, poverty in Sierra Leone accelerated posing the question of whether this was a delayed impact, after an initial recovery, of armed violence and SALW usage, or could be attributed primarily to other factors.

#### **1.4 Research challenges**

It is not a straightforward task to establish direct links between the introduction of SALW into communities/areas and subsequent changes in terms of impoverishment.

First, SALW are one of a number of variables that impact upon poverty. Disentangling SALW from other poverty-inducing impacts, such as poor governance, external conditionalities, social discontent and so on, is difficult. However, a starting point is to suggest that SALW have specific and distinctive security impacts that particularly impact, directly or indirectly, on development and impoverishment.

Second, specific data on SALW impacts are scarce. Few researchers have undertaken research in this area and those that have tend to prefer to focus on the impacts of violence or conflict rather than SALW.

Third, many people interviewed in the field, and elsewhere, found it difficult or were unwilling to distinguish SALW impacts. They tended to see the person behind armed violence or the tactics of various groups as the critical focus point, not the weapons.

### Box 1: Outline of the civil conflict in Sierra Leone

In 1991 a civil conflict broke out in Sierra Leone that was to last 11 years and devastate the country. A country that had been among the poorest in the world was made even poorer by the civil conflict that introduced considerable quantities of SALW into the country with profound impacts upon Sierra Leone and its people including the displacement of up to half of the country's population. At its height in 1998, between 60,000-80,000 combatants were involved in Sierra Leone out of a population of about 4.5m. A definitive figure for the numbers of people killed during the conflict has not been arrived at but the most commonly cited figure is 50,000 deaths. Diamonds became the main source of funding for the conflict in its later stages.

The conflict broke out in March 1991 when RUF combatants moved from Liberia into eastern Sierra Leone. The invading force was comprised of only 300 fighters and included mercenaries from Burkina Faso and forces from Charles Taylor's NPFL. The invasion and subsequent armed violence was underpinned to a large extent by Charles Taylor's desire to destabilise Sierra Leone and, in particular to secure the withdrawal of Sierra Leone troops from the ECOMOG peace operation in Liberia; to exploit revenues from Sierra Leone's diamond production; and to install the RUF in power in Sierra Leone.

However, the RUF developed a momentum of its own and grew as it forcibly abducted recruits and sought to recruit on the basis of its revolutionary ideology to overthrow the existing order. As they advanced throughout early 1991, RUF/NPFL forces abducted civilians, killed them, or forced them to carry looted property and perform domestic tasks. The burning of civilian residences and the targeting of government and traditional authorities, along with the violence against civilians, caused massive panic and an exodus of civilians northwards and inland. There were also individuals who identified themselves with the 'revolutionary rhetoric' of the movement and joined willingly.

The state was ineffective in its attempts to defend Sierra Leone against RUF armed violence and was compelled to draw upon the assistance of ECOMOG and other external actors. Further, elements of the army allied themselves with the RUF at certain points and seized the opportunity to enrich themselves and abuse civilians. Elements of the military staged a coup under Valentine Strasser and the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) was established and negotiated with the rebels who by 1995 had advanced within 20 miles of the capital, Freetown. With the help of the private security company, Executive Outcomes (EO), and Kamajor civil defence forces, the rebels were driven back, but a palace coup deposed Strasser in 1996. Elections were held in 1996 when Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was elected president but he was not recognised by the RUF and fighting resumed. With RUF fortunes in decline the Abidjan Accord was signed in November 1996 but anticipated peacekeeping forces to implement it did not materialise.

Another military coup was staged in 1997 with rebels and the Sierra Leone army forming the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) under Johnny Paul Koroma and Kabbah went into exile in neighbouring Guinea. The UN Security Council imposed an oil and arms embargo on Sierra Leone in response and ECOMOG blockaded Freetown and attacked junta positions. By February 1998, Kabbah was back in power and the UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMIL) was deployed. However, hopes that the RUF would fade away were not realised and with backing from Burkina Faso and Liberia it started to make significant military inroads across the country. Further, Nigeria was seeking to withdraw from its commitment to Sierra Leone and was no longer prepared to shoulder the costs of its engagement. The government signed the Lomé Accord in July 1999 which was underpinned by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) peacekeeping force.

However, the RUF continued to fight in parts of the countryside and the RUF was reluctant to allow UNAMSIL entry into diamond producing areas that it controlled. Events came to a head in May 2000 when the RUF took 500 peacekeepers hostage. This triggered a firmer military response from the UK and UNAMSIL. UK forces freed hostages taken by the rebel West Side Boys outside Freetown and decimated them as fighting force. The rebels were no longer able, or willing, to continue the conflict and in November 2000 the Abuja cease-fire was signed. During 2001, the dismantling of the RUF as a fighting force gathered pace through disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and in January 2002 the conflict was declared officially over. Elections took place in May 2002.

## **2. The context of armed violence and SALW possession and usage in Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone was by no means a gun-free state prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. However, it did not have a culture of armed violence where SALW were widely distributed or used within society. Traditional rites and practices in Sierra Leone, for example, were not centred on weapons as in some other countries and although hunting weapons were part of rural life they were used mainly for hunting and crop protection. While Sierra Leone had, and continues to have, a network of blacksmiths producing hunting weapons these were largely for their own communities and were used for hunting and there appears to be little trafficking of these weapons across communities or regions. Armed criminality was relatively low prior to the conflict and the state, despite its repressive nature over a number of decades prior to the conflict, did not habitually use armed violence against its citizens or neighbouring states on a large scale as in some other African states, although atrocities were committed against civilians.

The national army was small and poorly funded and equipped with military hardware. It had few SALW. Further, Sierra Leoneans in the main regarded themselves as a pacific people who settled disputes by traditional non-violent means within the community.

This was to change with the entry of several hundred SALW-armed RUF combatants into the east in 1991. From this point, SALW moved into Sierra Leone supplied by, or through neighbouring states, arms dealers, and northern states. Definitive figures as to how many SALW passed through Sierra Leone during the conflict are not available, but the quantities were small compared to many other African conflicts such as in Somalia, Angola and Mozambique. Most civilians did not acquire SALW during the conflict – either because they could not afford them or because they were not available – the army was poorly supplied, and the civil defence forces (CDF) that sprung up had to rely, particularly in the early days, on a few shotguns and any weapons they had captured. Many CDF were armed with sticks, clubs and machetes. However, the RUF was relatively well-armed with SALW such as assault rifles that enabled them at times to exert an impact out of proportion to their small numbers. The RUF only numbered several thousand at the height of the conflict.

### **2.1 External supplies**

It is highly unlikely that the RUF could have sustained its military campaign without direct assistance in acquiring SALW and military assistance from Liberia and other

neighbouring states. This prolonged the conflict and contributed to the suffering of the population and the retardation of development.

Taylor's assistance to the RUF was initially described as quite limited and was low on small arms and ammunition but there was a steady flow of small arms from Liberia to the RUF throughout much of the conflict.<sup>6</sup> The RUF was also supplied with arms by or from Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Libya. Libya provided training to the rebels and it is believed to have supplied weapons to the rebels. Cote d'Ivoire at various points during the conflict provided safe sanctuary and passage was provided for war materiel to the NPFL, for example.

The Sierra Leone Army (SLA) was not well armed at the onset of the civil war. The army had few weapons, and those it had were in poor condition, including its small arms.<sup>7</sup> Just prior to the outbreak of the civil war, the government concluded an agreement with China in 1990 and procured AK-47s and machine guns with the latter shipment arriving in the first half of 1991.<sup>8</sup>

However, with the outbreak of conflict, arms availability did increase in the first few months of the conflict. Further, the army was increased to around double its size and had reached perhaps 5,000 soldiers by April 1992. However, it never managed to effectively defend the population across the country from the RUF, irregular army units, and foreign forces that used SALW to intimidate, terrorise, displace and rob civilians.

Subsequently, the government, and the various army factions that staged coups, sought to increase their SALW holdings through private security companies, and through western states such as Italy. Following the amendment of UN sanctions in 1998, the UK became the biggest arms supplier to Sierra Leone. It was announced in October 1999 that the UK would be providing the government with 132 light machine guns (with 2m rounds of ammunition), 7,500 rifles, and 24 mortars with 2,000 rounds of ammunition.<sup>9</sup>

## **2.2 Internal circulation of SALW**

The relative shortage of SALW in Sierra Leone led all the parties to seek to capture, buy, or acquire SALW. Although relatively well armed, the RUF also actively sought to capture or acquire SALW from the army, ECOMOG, and the UN. The RUF, for example, took on weapons that the army had abandoned and SLA troops sometimes sold their weapons to the RUF. Similarly, the RUF seized or bought weapons from ECOMOG troops, particularly in 1998 as the rebels advanced on Freetown. National contingents of UNAMSIL on a number of occasions in the late 1990s also surrendered, or sold, weapons to the RUF.

The AFRC was said to have received weapons, including SALW from the RUF.<sup>10</sup> In its joint attacks with the RUF on civilians the AFRC also deliberately abandoned

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<sup>6</sup> Eric Berman, December 2000, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Berman, December 2000, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Berman, December 2000, p. 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Berman, December 2000, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Berman, December 2000, p. 22-23.

weapons that could be later 'collected' by the RUF, or sold them to the rebel group. However, CDF although supplied at various points by, for example, the SLA and EO, frequently had to rely on ambushes of the RUF to arm themselves.

### **2.3 Security impacts of SALW introduction/possession**

It was suggested earlier that SALW potentially contribute to patterns and cycles of insecurity and to the lengthening, lethality, and scale of armed violence with potential poverty impacts. It was also suggested that the acquisition of SALW by some groups are likely to trigger reactive arms acquisition by others (a form of 'arms racing'), further increasing levels of insecurity.

In Sierra Leone, as in some other internal conflicts, it is difficult to establish conclusively to what extent SALW contributed to the scale and lethality of conflicts. In conflicts such as the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the vast majority of fatalities were committed with non-SALW hardware. In Sierra Leone the numbers killed by SALW is not known. More than a quarter of all households had lost a member killed during the conflict. It is quite conceivable that large numbers could have been killed with clubs, sticks, machetes and similar weapons, rather than SALW. Further, many atrocities were committed in Sierra Leone with implements, rather than SALW – to heighten suffering and intimidate, most notably through amputation – which has had considerable impoverishing impacts on those affected.

At one level, the possession of SALW and their ability to kill large numbers of people rapidly – a military capacity largely denied to the CDF – could be described as giving the rebels an advantage and enabling them to continue the conflict over long periods of time with extremely small numbers of combatants and in the face of external intervention. With the power of the gun, the rebels were able, for example, to terrorise some communities and destroy their livelihoods across many districts with virtual impunity. However, this capacity for violence could be described to an extent as much attributable to the weakness of the national army and the indecisive nature of external military intervention until the closing stages of the conflict, as to the inherent advantages of being armed with SALW.

Further, a decisive factor in halting and eventually defeating the RUF was the CDF, which mobilised large numbers of civilians and traditional hunters to fight the RUF but had relatively few SALW. In some parts of the country for long periods of time they, in effect, repelled the RUF and allowed communities to lead relatively normal existences. Thus, non-SALW weapons provided an extremely valuable community protection function which safeguarded some individuals against impoverishment. Further, fighting in Sierra Leone did not lead to a massive escalation in the possession of SALW – even though arms were transferred into Sierra Leone and numbers of SALW increased – nor was the mass of the population armed or society comprehensively militarised. The power of the gun clearly exerted considerable influence within communities, but there is little evidence that most civilians wished to or did develop a reliance on small arms or adopted a gun culture. Rather, leaving aside individual acts of revenge and retaliation, there developed a deep trauma and a desire for the horrors of the conflict to end amongst much of the civilian population. This contributed to a gathering revulsion and antipathy towards the RUF as the

conflict progressed and eroded some initial support for the RUF based on its promises to build a fairer more equalitarian society.

Where SALW did contribute to chronic insecurity and cycles of violence was mainly at the local level in the absence of protection. These localised insecurities also had knock-on impacts on other parts of the country in terms of halting supplies, closing down markets, and causing mass displacements.

SALW were not normally used by the rebels for conventional 'war-fighting' purposes, such as meeting opponents in pitched battle and for the holding and defence of clearly defined territory, but rather to create disorder and insecurity within which certain objectives and needs could be met. The RUF and other groups used SALW among other things:

- to empty communities, to create confusion and disorder, and to allow them to seize new recruits and project (in the case of the RUF) its commitment to 'revolutionary' change;
- for group plunder purposes and for personal enrichment/survival;
- for revenge/empowerment and so-called 'psychological' purposes;
- to seize communities and utilise them for supply or strategic and tactical purposes.
- for community defence and survival.

Sometimes the 'winning' of conflict – for example the defeat of an enemy – was secondary or not even an immediate objective. Government forces often played a peripheral role and the RUF would only hold onto a few established bases and would disappear and re-emerge from the bush unpredictably. It was in areas in the south and east mainly that the CDF established strongholds that they protected.

The consequences of the use of SALW to further these tactics and objectives were considerable in terms of insecurity. Few communities were safe. The targeting of communities by RUF combatants would frequent involve surprise, or 'hit and run' raids in which adults were either shot, or tortured to death, and some villagers recruited for slave functions, particularly in the east for mining purposes. Children were forcibly recruited into the RUF, trained, and indoctrinated.

At other times, particularly early in the conflict, the RUF would announce raids on villages persuading many villagers to flee. Traditional leaderships were routinely killed if they had not already fled villages. The net impact of this was to create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity through the entry or threatened entry of SALW-armed RUF. Few civilians in towns such as Makeni had the capacity to defend themselves against SALW, the government provided little or no protection, and the CDFs were frequently poorly equipped or weak. Some northern-based CDF fighters actually joined the RUF when Makeni was taken, interviewed civilians suggested.<sup>11</sup>

Many villagers were forced to flee or hide in the bush and scramble a subsistence living or head to urban areas to pursue a precarious living. Further, where the RUF

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with civil society organisations and ex-combatants in Makeni, May 2004.

occupied strategic towns, such as Makeni, many in the community were compelled to stay and assist the RUF, including providing foodstuffs.

Within CDF-protected or defended areas, such as Bo Town in the south, the appearance of RUF and AFRC armed with SALW posed an acute security threat for largely unarmed civilians. The RUF imposed a siege around Bo town. However, civilians confronted the RUF and despite huge casualties prevented the RUF from taking the town. Faced with armed RUF, the social capital and solidarity of the town, which had a reputation for fierce resistance to government repression, held firm and did not fragment. In other areas where the CDF developed control, communities managed to live a relatively secure existence for much of the conflict.

However, the impact of SALW on the urban setting of Freetown were highly divisive and destabilising. The entry of the RUF into Freetown in 1997, and their dispersal by Nigerian ECOMOG troops in 1998, for example, led to an orgy of shootings and reprisals against civilians. Freetown was ill-prepared for the RUF attacks. Many in Freetown thought of RUF incursions as a rural matter that would not directly impact upon Freetown. The army was unable to protect Freetown – indeed the AFRC invited the RUF in – and civilians were denied protection. Further, social solidarity was much weaker in Freetown than in many other parts of the country with large numbers of refugees and a social/ethnic composition that was diverse. In a few days, thousands were shot and the city disintegrated into extreme violence with any civilian liable to be reported as a collaborator to the Nigerians or to the RUF and summarily shot. Many civilians hid almost permanently in their houses or elsewhere and only emerged to gather food. Trust between neighbours was undermined by these high levels of insecurity.

In fact, one of the more enduring impacts of SALW was not so much the numbers of people killed or injured by SALW, although these were high, but more social and psychological. The possession of SALW allowed certain individuals, including the poor, whom regarded themselves as wronged, disadvantaged or otherwise lacked power, to assert themselves against civilians through robbery, terror tactics, rape and killings. At the same time, the entry of RUF, army units, and at times CDF into communities created mass terror whose impacts are still evident today. Gunshots became associated with the terrorisation of communities and towns. Civilians in Freetown, Bo and Makeni related how the sound of gunshots, or noises that sounded like them, still in 2004 induced physical manifestations of stress. In 2001, British military officers working with the Sierra Leone army noted that army firing exercises required prior notification to the population on radio shows and through other means to avert panic and fears that fighting had broken out again.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, SALW contributed to creating cycles of insecurity and near anarchy in parts of Sierra Leone where:

- traditional customs, practices, and authorities were undermined and the old ways no longer necessarily provided security and stability;
- law and order, to the extent it existed, collapsed and robbery and personal enrichment was pervasive;

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with British army officers, Freetown, November 2001.

- any residual confidence in the state as a protector collapsed and it in fact was widely regarded as an abuser;
- survival became even more dependent on the group, the extended family, or external intervention such as the provision of IDP camps or protection from external forces, who sometimes, in turn, abused the impoverished.
- SALW became livelihood earners for those who possessed them and a means of survival in a hostile environment.

### **3. The impact of SALW and armed violence on poverty**

This section examines what impacts the insecurities associated with SALW usage and possession in Sierra Leone had on development and, in particular, in terms of impoverishment.

#### **3.1 Economic activity**

There is clear evidence that armed violence led to considerable declines in economic activity in Sierra Leone and increased impoverishment. Declines in economic performance can be directly traced to periods where armed violence was at its height and to specific conflict incidents – such as SALW-armed RUF seizing mines in 1995. This denied the government an important source of income and contributed to further declines in its already limited capacity to deliver services to the population, including the poor. The insecurities faced by many civilians where gun-toting individuals and groups could seize goods or rob, led to the curtailment of normal patterns of economic activities with many civilians choosing to hide in their homes, flee into the bush, or disperse to non-conflict zones. All this brought traditional economic activities, such as markets, to a halt.

Although poverty was acute before the conflict,<sup>13</sup> and had been worsening for several years by 1990, it was estimated that over 80% of the population lived below the poverty line of US\$1 per capita per day, the conflict markedly exacerbated poverty levels and retarded prospects for development.<sup>14</sup> During 1991-99, there were attempts to implement reform but these were held back by outburst of armed violence and the consequent political instability.

Declines in economic activities came to a head in the mid-1990s. The escalation of rebel activities at the end of 1995, which spread to the mining areas, meant that government programmes ran into significant difficulties. RUF attacks and closures of bauxite and rutile mines, as well as disruptions to other economic activities, led economic growth to plummet in 1995. Mining and manufacturing companies closed down with total investment and output declining to their lowest levels during the height of the civil conflict in 1997-1999. Armed violence lessened with the election of the democratic government and a new economic recovery programme in 1996.

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<sup>13</sup> There were a number of variables, other than armed violence, which influenced poverty prior to the civil war. For example, some farmers withdrew from rice production to subsistence production because of the Stevens' administration policy of importing rice. Diamond production had been reduced to a trickle shortly before the outbreak of the civil war because of smuggling. Further government expenditure on welfare fell dramatically in the 1980s. Government corruption and economic mismanagement had a considerable impact on poverty in this pre-conflict period as well as armed violence during the conflict. Insights provided by Professor Zack-Williams to the author.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, 17 July 2001, p. 1.

Despite the uncertain security environment, economic performance improved considerably with real GDP growth rising to 5% and inflation declining to about 6% in 1996.<sup>15</sup>

However, the coup in May 1997 and the RUF invasion of Freetown in January 1999, which was accompanied by massive socio-economic infrastructure destruction, led to real GDP plunging 20% in 1997, stagnating in 1998, and declining a further 8% in 1999. Armed violence led to widespread destruction and hampered the government's capacity to mobilise domestic resources and also considerably reduced average household income.

In 1999, Sierra Leone was in a state of near total social, economic and physical destruction, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Entire villages and some larger rural towns had been completely destroyed.<sup>16</sup> 70% of Sierra Leoneans were unemployed, of which 55% were youths, and the majority of industry was closed down.<sup>17</sup> Virtually all rural banks had been destroyed.<sup>18</sup> All this drastically curtailed economic activities in Sierra Leone. Many civilians in Freetown, for example, in 1997-1998, were unable to emerge from their homes because they risked being shot. Some only emerged at night to forage for food and normal patterns of trade, including markets, were impossible to sustain. Further, business people were unable to trade for long periods and shopkeepers kept their shops closed much of the time and consumed their own stocks in order to survive or avoid being robbed by neighbours or combatants.

Diamond mine inaccessibility considerably reduced rural incomes and worsened poverty in both rural and urban communities. Many youths, in particular, had been dependent on mining to scratch a living. The closure of mines or their seizure by armed RUF closed an important economic activity which had drastic consequences in terms of impoverishment. Indeed, the only reliable source of an income or livelihood for many youths was to join an armed group. The uncertainty and risk associated with conflict minimized development activities by donors in Sierra Leone.

Nevertheless, real GDP recovered by 3.8% in 2000 following improvements in the security situation and expansion in economic activities. The economy continued to recover with the consolidation of the peace process and the collection of SALW and disarmament in 2001. There was real growth of 5.4% in 2001 and the recovery of economic activity accelerated in 2002. Real GDP growth reached an estimated 6.6% in 2002 in line with a donor-financed upsurge in imports, increased agricultural output, increased resettlement and rehabilitation, removal of war-related constraints on trade and mobility, commercial growth, and stable price levels, according to the UN.<sup>19</sup>

However, the Leone currency depreciated 30% in 2001 reversing the appreciation in 2000. Further, during 2003-4, inflation increased dramatically (around 300% in less

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<sup>15</sup> World Bank, April 2003, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> ILO, February 2000, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> ILO, February 2000, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> ILO, February 2000, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Country Team, March 2003, p. 6.

than two years) with certain key commodities such as petrol, palm oil and rice increasingly becoming outside the means of considerable sectors of the population.

### *Poverty impacts*

- SALW-armed combatants were able to close down or divert production in mining area which led directly to economic growth plummeting in Sierra Leone further impoverishing much of the population.
- Rural youths, particularly those dependent on diamond mining, were impoverished as a result of armed violence.
- Falls in GDP and economic growth can be directly traced to incidents of armed violence.

## **3.2 Food security and agricultural productivity**

Some of the most direct poverty impacts can be attributed to the destruction of agricultural livelihoods caused by armed violence and consequent food insecurity. Agriculture was, and continues to be, one of the most important sectors in Sierra Leone. In 2003, the World Bank noted that agriculture employed around two-thirds of the working population with subsistence agriculture dominating the sector.<sup>20</sup>

However, agriculture was severely disrupted during the conflict with the introduction of SALW in places such as Bo and Makeni. In Bo Town the failure of the RUF to take the town led to a siege in which supplies into the town were drastically reduced by a cordon of SALW-armed RUF who established checkpoints through which any civilians seeking to forage for supplies would have to pass. Outside and encircling the RUF, Kamajors and ECOWAS troops operated further checkpoints. The net result of this was to virtually starve Bo Town and destroy its agricultural links with neighbouring communities. When Makeni was taken by the RUF all livestock were killed and agriculture virtually ground to a halt.<sup>21</sup> In fact, by 2000 the RUF had virtually starved itself in Makeni and had to rely on supplies of food from INGOs. In both contexts, food insecurity was rife and traditional patterns of agriculture destroyed and those reliant upon it were impoverished. In Makeni and Freetown people starved as a result of the curtailed supplies of food caused by the conflict, particularly when family members or household heads were shot or disabled and the family network collapsed. Neighbours and traditional food support systems no longer functioned as other families could barely fend for themselves in most instances.

Throughout the RUF occupation of Kambia District, agricultural production and livestock was disrupted. Rural infrastructure was destroyed including stores and drying floors and agricultural machinery, while the unavailability of seeds, and the inability to cultivate land because of insecurity and massive displacement, led to a considerable decline in agricultural activity and therefore impacted upon food security in the region. Further, during the conflict markets were heavily disrupted with market centres totally vandalized or burnt down.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> World Bank, April 2003, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Interviews with community leaders in Makeni, May 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Kambia Humanitarian Task Force, June 2001, p. 15.

The conflict severely disrupted agricultural activities across Sierra Leone and led to the displacement of an estimated 500,000 farm families, and the loss of farm inputs, and the destruction of rural infrastructure, institutions and service centres. Fish production and livestock populations were also significantly reduced. In particular, rice production, a key nutritional commodity, slumped across Sierra Leone and there was a movement from traditional foodstuffs to less nutritious root crops and 'bush' products. Farmers were forced to flee as the conditions in many villages were too insecure and precarious to tend rice and they risked being shot. If rice was produced, farmers were vulnerable to having their crops seized by SALW-armed combatants. Root crops became more prevalent because they were easier to tend, or consume on the run, and were less likely to be targeted by combatants during the conflict. Nonetheless, these were also seized by combatants after communities ran out of rice supplies. Those local populations that stayed were sometimes tithed to support war camps.<sup>23</sup>

The post-conflict consequences of damaged rice production have been considerable. Rice is the staple food for about 99% of the population, it was reported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 2001.<sup>24</sup> Rice production in 2002 was reported as increasing by 36% on 2001 levels and reaching 78% of pre-conflict levels. However, this only met 50% of the 2003 domestic requirement, according to a UN Transitional Appeal for Relief and Recovery Report. Sierra Leone is now heavily dependent on rice imports, although dependence on imported rice predated the civil war.<sup>25</sup> The consequence of this is that rice in Sierra Leone costs more than in, for example, the UK, and is of a poorer quality, and is well beyond the means of much of the population.

In other sectors, agriculture still has not fully recovered from armed violence - for example many palm and coffee plantations are still out of use after being burnt or suffering long-term damage from lack of tending. A series of other impacts from armed violence can be identified, such as: declines in agricultural infrastructure, rural credit facilities, markets, and the availability of farming equipment. A further impact was that the conflict destroyed the artisan blacksmith industry which had been the backbone of small farmer agricultural production.

During the conflict, basic food commodities tripled in price in some urban centres, it was noted in 1999. And in rebel-held areas, such as Makeni, malnutrition was severe with a prevalence in children aged under five at a level of 25-40% in one location in the district in 1999.

*Poverty impacts:*

- SALW attacks on civilians in towns such as Makeni and Bo Town forced many to flee into the bush and survive as they could on 'bush' products. Many suffered from malnutrition or were ill and unable to work or support their families

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<sup>23</sup> Richards, August 2003, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> UNDP, 29 April 2002, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> Observation by Professor Zack-Williams to the author.

- ❑ Farmers lost their livelihoods as they were too fearful of armed combatants to farm. Further, they were robbed and their agricultural assets sometimes destroyed.
- ❑ Patterns of agriculture were changed by armed violence. Rice farmers risked being shot and output slumped. Limited farming of root crops – such as cassava – took its place, but this was less nutritious. Following the conflict, rice production still has not fully recovered.

However, agricultural production did continue in some towns where the RUF considered it expedient to allow it (supplies were seized or passed onto the RUF) and in some CDF-held areas where agriculture was maintained to both feed fighters and civilians.

### **3.3 Infrastructure destruction and trade**

The appearance of SALW-armed RUF in towns and villages frequently overwhelmed local CDF, particularly in the absence of support from the army or ECOMOG or UN forces. The process of fear and intimidation meant that the RUF was free to destroy and rob government and other buildings and houses on which many civilians depended. The RUF frequently targeted houses for burning and robbing and government buildings were routinely destroyed as part of a process of undermining the government. Much of Sierra Leone was devastated by the conflict with over 3,000 villages and towns damaged by widespread destruction of homes, health care and basic facilities and infrastructure.<sup>26</sup>

Kambia District, which the RUF relinquished control over in May 2001, saw the majority of public buildings and much private housing destroyed by the RUF and cross border bombardment by Guinean forces. It has been estimated to have suffered 80-90% housing destruction during the conflict.<sup>27</sup> Further, the RUF had made bridges and minor roads impassable to traffic. It was estimated after the conflict that 60% of all intact houses in 2003 had been damaged during the conflict and of those 58% were significantly or severely damaged. Nearly three-quarters of Kenema sample houses had been damaged, while in Tonkolili it was 72%, and 69% in Bo and Kono districts.<sup>28</sup>

SALW were used to disrupt supplies and transportation. The RUF, in particular, ambushed government lorries and supplies sent to besieged areas through SALW attacks. They also co-opted lorry drivers they did not kill to deliver their own supplies. The army and the CDF also hijacked suspected RUF supplies and robbed lorry drivers. Another tactic used by SALW-armed RUF was to surround key towns, such as Bo, and enforce a siege where supplies into Bo from surroundings villages, vital to its survival, were squeezed, and normal patterns of trade became impossible. The RUF attempted to disrupt supplies to a number of provincial towns and were close enough to Freetown and main roads to Makeni, for example, to seriously disrupt supplies. Supplies, in fact, ran short in a number of provincial towns.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations Country Team, March 2003, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Fanthorpe, February 2003, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Kenefick and Conte, June 2003, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> Clapham, July 2003, p. 13.

Local and regional trading patterns were altered with some markets no longer being sustainable post-conflict and towns and communities close to Sierra Leone's borders choosing to switch trade to neighbouring countries. Post-conflict recovery has been slow with deliveries of goods down on the pre-conflict period. Further, many lorry drivers were killed and the remaining ones are largely impoverished. In Makeni, for example, few lorry drivers have jobs and have to rely on loading and unloading lorries from other districts.<sup>30</sup> Whereas previously they might have owned a lorry or being able to sustainability rent it; they were no longer able to purchase a lorry or afford the rents. Towns that had big markets and were centres for regional trade, such as Makeni, have not fully recovered and assumed their former importance. Despite road construction and repair, some roads are still in bad repair and cut-off during the June-July rainy season, truck drivers reported. Feeder roads, which provided outlets for farmers to sell their products in market centres, were either dug up or the bridges destroyed by rebels and have not been fully renewed. The Ministry of Transport and Communication estimated that around 75% of privately operated vehicles were destroyed or burnt during May 1997 and the instability that followed.

*Poverty impacts:*

- The majority of householders had their houses destroyed or they were evicted at gunpoint in conflict zones in Sierra Leone. At the same time, they often lost their possessions and were robbed. This in itself impoverished them and often destroyed their livelihoods displacing them into IDP or refugee camps or making them dependent on subsistence strategies.
- SALW-armed rebels cut off the supplies to many towns and villages by shooting or intimidating lorry drivers seeking to keep roads open and feed starving civilians. The RUF also laid siege to key towns. Many people in besieged towns were impoverished or even starved and communities have yet to fully recover. Many lorry drivers were, and continue to be, impoverished and are without work.
- Armed violence has changed patterns of trade and transportation. Roads have yet to fully recover, despite foreign investment, and fewer lorries are transporting goods than before the conflict. The violence changed trading patterns in that communities and markets that formerly had trading links could no longer do so because of the dangers of armed violence. Thus, some communities adjacent to borders shifted trade to neighbouring countries or transported goods by sea rather than over land. For some traders this has brought financial benefits as they get better prices: for example for palm oil in Guinea. However, others are poorer.

### **3.4 Social and cultural impacts**

The possession and use of SALW, particularly by youths and groups that had been traditionally disadvantaged or impoverished, has had lasting impacts upon societal relations in Sierra Leone. Individuals who had little or no power in communities were able with the power of a gun in their hands to enrich themselves, take revenge against those they regarded as having exploited them, and to assume, albeit temporarily in many instances, positions in a new hierarchy. Further, those who fled armed violence,

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<sup>30</sup> Interviews with lorry drivers in Makeni, May 2004.

in some instances emerged with a new determination to oppose traditional hierarchies or gained new insights into human rights issues. Experiences during the civil conflict of abuses of power have generated 'acute rights awareness' among sectors of the population.<sup>31</sup>

A key impact of armed violence was the undermining of patrimony. Traditional leaders in much of the country proved unable to protect their communities from armed violence and fled. The CDF, as well as the RUF, initiated significant changes in the countryside. They developed considerable independence of the hierarchy of traditional rural chiefs during the conflict. The CDF assumed increasing importance as a source of authority. Civilians supported CDF fighters with food and other resources and the CDF assumed considerable authority with disputes, for example, not being settled by local courts presided over by chiefs, but the guild of kamajoisia. Like the RUF, many in the CDF were determined to secure a better deal and justice for the young, who had suffered under corrupt chiefs and the justice system. Indeed, the CDF were known to have threatened chiefs with violence in some instances.<sup>32</sup> Deferential attitudes to village hierarchies post-conflict are being challenged by younger people and villagers post-conflict, who abandoned by their chiefs, are no longer prepared to stay quiet. Strangers, women and youths are said to be prepared to speak out in meetings, and openly complain against grievances, including the misuse of humanitarian/development aid that did not find its way to the less powerful. People are said to talk openly about their 'eyes now being open' and that during the conflict when they were hiding in the bush from SALW-armed RUF they had no alternative but to 'stand by themselves'.<sup>33</sup> However, deference to authority and an unwillingness to speak out against the powerful can still be detected in large sectors of the population.

At the same time, the growth of 'individualism' and looting has made the parallel market an endemic aspect of social life.<sup>34</sup> All groups, and many individuals, involved in the fighting used the power of the gun to extract resources, to enrich themselves, and to fund the conflict.<sup>35</sup> And some observers have suggested that Sierra Leone has become a less communal society in the post-conflict period.

For many, the fractures in societal relations engendered by the use of SALW and armed violence has had negative impacts. In Freetown, for example, over 7,000 people were killed in January 1999 alone representing the killing of 0.7% of Freetown residents over a three-week period.<sup>36</sup> Thousands suffered shootings. A survey by Médecins Sans Frontières of a major general hospital in Freetown in February 1999 found 215 war-related injuries (57% gunshot wounds, 30% cutlass injuries and 6% shelling injuries).<sup>37</sup> Neighbours were unable to trust each other and lived in fear of being shot or killed by the RUF or by ECOMOG troops seeking out informers, and many householders, particularly the better off, had their houses looted by neighbours with whom they had previously enjoyed good relations. Being reported by a

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<sup>31</sup> Fanthorpe, February 2003, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Richards, August 2003, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Richards, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Richards, August 2003, p. 37.

<sup>35</sup> United Methodist Committee on Relief, 19 April 2000, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Salama et al, 11 December 1999, p. 1569.

<sup>37</sup> Salama et al, 11 December 1999, p. 1569.

neighbour as a 'spy' or sympathetic to a rival group was enough for many to be summarily shot. The fallout from this has been a long-term erosion of trust and reciprocity in many parts of Freetown, interviewees reported.

An under-estimated impact of SALW and the violence committed with them is the continuing trauma experienced by perhaps the majority of Sierra Leoneans. Virtually all have lost members of their immediate or extended family either killed by SALW or by other weapons, or seriously injured. Many are still in a state of barely surpassed shock or trauma, which could be readily re-activated by armed violence. Civilians interviewed in Freetown, for example, recounted how any sound that resembles gunfire (such as a car miss-firing) can send them into a state of trauma.<sup>38</sup> The impact of this trauma is difficult to quantify but some interviewees speculate that it had led to a sense of apathy, listlessness, and a lack of energy in some quarters to tackle Sierra Leone's post-conflict problems. An INGO worker who has spend many years in Sierra Leone noted that many of the people he worked with lacked the confidence to make decisions or to change things – attitudes that seem to be related to the trauma of the conflict.<sup>39</sup>

However, although the thought of a return to conflict fills many Sierra Leoneans with horror, the behaviour of the government during the conflict, and its continuing corruption, could readily spark demonstrations and renewed large-scale violence. In March 2005, thousands of students, clashed with police who opened fire with assault rifles, it is alleged, and injured at least three protestors.<sup>40</sup> The protest started over lecturer strikes over non-payment of salaries. The outrage in civil society over the shootings and the police being allegedly armed with AK-47s has been manifest and had the potential to lead to massive demonstrations and violence if the government mishandled the situation.<sup>41</sup> Earlier in the year in January, the unions flexed their muscles with a one day strike that paralysed the country and shut down Lungi airport. Ex-CDF fighters and others elements, such as so-called 'area boys', as well as civil society, have the capacity to readily react to any government actions that are seen as repressive.

### *Poverty impacts*

- The revolt against traditional authority during the conflict and the temporary empowerment of some youths through SALW possession and usage has not led to any significant economic dividend for the young. They remain impoverished, and youth combatants amongst the most so. Although traditional leaders are in some instances comparatively less well off as a result of the conflict, they still retain much of their power and authority in the countryside. Social capital in many villages remains damaged by an uneasy stand-off between tradition and new ideas that have emerged following armed violence, particularly amongst those who fled to refugee and IDP camps where they picked up new conceptions of human rights. This may be hampering recovery.

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<sup>38</sup> Interviews conducted in Freetown in May 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Interview conducted with INGO in Freetown, May 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Reported in Freetown press, March 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Information provided by Christiana Solomon from Freetown, March 2005.

- Violence committed with SALW and other weapons within both urban and rural settings seriously undermined trust, norms, reciprocity and networks. This had a carry-over impact post-conflict in that it damaged networks and social transactions that traditionally provided some sort of safety net for the impoverished, or those who were in danger of becoming impoverished.

### 3.5 Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups

Vulnerable groups were exploited and impoverished as a result of SALW violence. There has been little post-conflict improvement in their situation.

Many women were co-opted by the rebels, the army and CDF fighters (4,751 women passed through the DDR programme) as commander's wives, prostitutes, slaves, spies, but some were also involved in the planning and execution of violence. Rape and sexual violence was rampant. Women generally suffered extremely high levels of violence. The level of prostitution has risen sharply post-conflict, while the age of the 'Kolonkos', as young prostitutes (some school girls) are nicknamed, has been falling to alarmingly low levels.<sup>42</sup> In a survey of war-related sexual violence and other human rights abuses against IDPs in Sierra Leone, 13% of household members reported incidents of war-related abductions, beatings, killings, sexual assaults and other abuses. 9% reported war-related sexual assaults.<sup>43</sup>

Sexual networks were altered through the displacement of populations, psychological trauma and the progressive impoverishment of women. Sexual contact with internationals and combatants has led to rapid increases in HIV infection. Social problems, such as crime, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, rose, as did the incidence of war-related trauma. The rebel invasion of the capital in January 1999 led to large numbers of young girls, women and children being raped and kidnapped.

Boys were forced into prostitution both in Sierra Leone (mainly in response to demand from internationals) and in neighbouring countries such as Guinea in order to support their families, or for survival purposes if they became destitute. Prior to the conflict, male prostitution was virtually unknown and carried considerable stigma because of its associations with homosexuality, which was, and still is, strongly disapproved of in Sierra Leone.

Child soldiers were co-opted by all sides (6,787 passed through DDR) and were particularly badly treated by the RUF. The RUF sometimes gave children and youths a mixture of cocaine, gun powder and alcohol to increase their aggression. An estimated 36,600 children were said to have been affected by the conflict in 2001 including child soldiers, camp followers, street children and war-affected children in IDP camps.<sup>44</sup>

The young – whether combatants or not – suffered impoverishing impacts during and after the conflict. In the 1980s, the national economy started to decline, corruption prevailed, prices of raw materials dropped considerably, mining revenues fell, and increasing numbers of youths in this climate found themselves out of school, without

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<sup>42</sup> Bright, June 2001, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Amowitz, 23 January 2002, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> UNDP, 29 April 2002, p. 67.

employment and without support. The conflict made their economic prospects even worse with schools destroyed, farms plundered for cash-crops and food, and trade and business activities curtailed due to dangers of attack and ambushes.

Rural youth, particularly in the east, many of whom who had moved there attracted by diamond mining, lived in a violent and uncertain world.<sup>45</sup> With schools, apprenticeships, training institutes and normal educational opportunities closed down, young people turned to other opportunities, including joining a militia. Many youths took up arms as a survival strategy. Holding weapons gave them an 'advantage over unarmed civilians who have food or other items'.<sup>46</sup>

The future prospects of Sierra Leone will depend in large part on the economic opportunities open to youths and measures to address their social inclusion, especially as they constitute 2.5m of the population, and include a small but vocal number of ex-combatants.<sup>47</sup>

### *Poverty impacts*

- Women have been particularly impoverished by armed violence in Sierra Leone. Women were highly disadvantaged before the conflict, with rape and domestic violence common, and they had few rights (they were not permitted to buy property for example). Once raped, women had a highly possibility of losing their husbands and hence their capacity to support themselves, as many were dependent on them financially. Further, the health impacts of rape, with social services destroyed, often incapacitated them and prevented them from working. Following the conflict, women without husbands have found it extremely difficult to re-marry as few men are in a position to support a new family that any new wife is likely to bring. However, an unintended consequence of armed violence has been that some women have been alerted to the inequities of the past and are challenging some of the chauvinistic norms that underpinned injustice and violence against women. This may assist in the future in opening up new employment opportunities for women.
- Other groups, such as the disabled, were left to fend for themselves during the conflict and died or fell sick. The desperate conditions of the conflict led to many being abandoned and sinking further into poverty. They have also been hampered by perceptions in society that being disabled is a consequence of past 'sins'.
- Youths sometimes managed to enrich themselves during the conflict through armed robbery and pillaging. However, this has not been sustained following the ending of the conflict when many are viewed with suspicion by communities, or even their own families, and sustainable employment is elusive. If anything, they are poorer than before the conflict, despite GoSL and international programmes that seek to build livelihoods and create alternatives to violence for the young.

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<sup>45</sup> Clapham, C., July 2003, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> Peters, K., April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> UNAMSIL, August 2003, p. 7.

### 3.6 Political economy factors

The exploitation of civilians by combatants had negative impacts in terms of impoverishment. Captives were taken by the RUF for slave labour purposes and these were mainly illiterate adults. Often, they were worked to death. In Tane Chiefdom, SALW-armed RUF extracted food from civilians and mobilized forced labour for gold mining activities. Control of the diamond fields became a key strategic objective of the conflict. Areas under RUF control were normally stripped of items of value, such as housing materials, timber and motorized vehicles. If these were not put to RUF use, they were trafficked over the border or sold or bartered. The acquisition of loot has been described as one of the key driving forces for the acquisition of territory by the RUF.<sup>48</sup> All the parties depended on diamonds as a major direct or indirect part of their revenue including mercenary forces, the RUF and its Liberian backers, government forces, local militias, and individuals in ECOMOG and UNAMSIL forces.<sup>49</sup>

#### *Poverty impacts*

- Rebels armed with SALW closed down mining areas and industry which impoverished many people, particularly those in rural areas. Where the RUF continued mining, people were coerced into working there at gunpoint for little or no wages further impoverishing them and their families. Further, the closure of mining and key industries denied the government revenues which meant they spent even less on social and other government services.
- Combatants enriched themselves through the power of the gun through the seizure of government and private company assets and also by robbing civilians of their assets. This was not limited to the rebels.

### 3.7 Social Services

Social services were virtually closed down during the conflict which had drastic impacts upon health and education and knock-on effects on livelihoods. There has been post-conflict rebuilding of social services, but shortages of supplies, poor infrastructure, and difficulties in paying staff, are hampering recovery. Many of the weak, aged, or young died of treatable ailments during the conflict due to a lack of medical attention. UNICEF observed as late as 2001 that the protracted conflict was having a dramatic impact on health.<sup>50</sup> Population movements, overcrowding, and poor sanitary living conditions had exacerbated already high mortality, and infectious diseases such as malaria, pneumonia, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Routine childhood immunisation had almost completely collapsed in some areas of Sierra Leone and infant and under-five mortality rates were among the highest in the world. In late 2000, only 26% of Peripheral Health Units (PHUs) were found to be functional. National Recovery data in June 2003 showed that 224 PHUs out of 624 had been rehabilitated and there were functional referral hospitals in all but two districts. However, considerable problems remain particularly in areas that have large numbers of returnees and poor accessibility.

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<sup>48</sup> Shaw, March 2003, p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> Clapham, July 2003, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> See: UNICEF (undated), p.1.

During the conflict, Sierra Leone is estimated to have lost more than 50% of health facilities with armed-rebels deliberately targeting and destroying health facilities and displacing staff as part of a strategy to create chaos and undermine the state. Further, the destruction of infrastructure across all sectors affected health centre operations, and was still doing so in 2002, because transport, communications, electricity, and water supply were all severely affected.<sup>51</sup> Many NGOs who delivered health care during the conflict in rural areas suffered severe damage during the conflict. Of 47 mission facilities in operation before the 1997 coup, only 20 were reported to be functioning in January 2003.<sup>52</sup>

A lack of health resources was exacerbated by staff attrition, inadequate on-job training, the emigration of medical doctors, distortions in the geographic distribution of health workers, many of whom left unsafe areas and came to work in Freetown, and the lack of skills and motivation of the remaining health workers.<sup>53</sup> The conflict further devastated the water supply infrastructure, which was already inadequate in terms of meeting the needs of the population prior to the conflict. In 2000, it was estimated that only between 22-35% of the population had access to portable water.<sup>54</sup>

Education opportunities were lost due to armed violence. Many youths in taking up arms lost out on as much as 11 years of formal education. In addition, informal skills passed down from fathers to sons (as in agriculture) were foregone, and have not been recovered in many instances, and schools were destroyed or closed. All this has contributed to high youth unemployment rates and their post-conflict impoverishment. Teachers have also been impoverished by armed violence. Post-conflict education has yet to recover and many teachers have to take out other livelihoods to survive with some even trading with pupils to make a living.<sup>55</sup> Further, many families in communities such as Bo are unable to afford to send their children to school.

*Poverty impacts:*

- The shooting and intimidation of teachers, health workers and others engaged in the social services, principally by the RUF, had drastic impoverishing impacts. Many were often reduced to the same level as the long-term poor. Further, they were unable to help other civilians with infrastructure destroyed and the curtailment of drugs and medical supplies.
- Education was particularly affected as many youths missed the key years of their education during the 11-year conflict. And many have been unable to find employment, in part due to their lack of qualifications or education. Those that have returned to school post-conflict are often listless and disinterested.
- Disease – much of it normally treatable – accelerated with the deepening of armed violence with no real provision of drugs or safe water. Population movements, over-crowding, and poor sanitary conditions, stimulated by insecurity and violence, further exacerbated disease outbreaks. The poor health of many Sierra Leoneans, which may have been treatable prior to armed violence, is pushing many further into poverty.

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<sup>51</sup> World Bank, 22 January 2003, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> World Bank, 22 January 2003, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> World Bank, 22 January 2003, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> UNDP, 29 April 2002, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Interviews with teachers in Makeni, May 2004.

### 3.8 Population movements

SALW violence in the countryside led to urban migration, and often impoverishment, and also a reluctance post-conflict to return to rural areas. During the conflict, over 50% of Sierra Leone's population became long-term displaced and thousands died. All this has led to significant impacts on the sustainability of rural communities some of which have been abandoned. One impact of SALW violence, it was reported during field work research in Makeni, was that many villagers were now unwilling to stay in small communities as they offered little protection against any future violence that may break out in Sierra Leone.

SALW possession and usage and armed violence, then, profoundly modified settlement patterns within Sierra Leone and changed the geographical distribution of the population. In towns such as Freetown, infrastructure and local services were unable to cope with this massive inflow of people. To an extent, kinship solidarity (if IDPs had family connections in Freetown), provided accommodation, assistance and protection, but this was not sustainable in the long-term, and migration put a severe strain on already impoverished family networks. New squatter settlements rapidly grew in the outskirts of Freetown to absorb the mass of rural inhabitants anticipating making a 'faster' and easier living in the capital, but most of them become marginalized and slipped into urban poverty.<sup>56</sup>

The east seemed to suffer most in terms of displacement. More than half the households in Kailahun were formal refugees, while more than half in Kenema were IDPs. A third of households in a Kono sample were informal refugees in that families had crossed the border and lived for a period of time outside Sierra Leone. However, in contrast, the southern region had the least number of displaced households. Few households had been formal refugees – in Bo District, for example, only about 20%.<sup>57</sup>

#### *Poverty impacts:*

- Anecdotal evidence suggests few refugees or IDPs fleeing armed violence have managed to improve their economic position following the conflict. Indeed, it seems they have generally become more impoverished having in many instances to resort to petty trading, begging, or subsistence living. For most, the move from the countryside to urban areas has had an impoverishing affect. Their absence has also impacted upon rural communities denying them skills and expertise in sectors such as agriculture and adding to impoverishment. There may be some beneficiaries from skills-training and other forms of assistance offered in refugee and IDP camps, but in the poor economic climate pertaining in Sierra Leone there is little scope for these being exercised. Civilians who fled Sierra Leone for neighbouring countries as refugees have frequently been abused and have found it hard to find viable livelihoods on returning.

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<sup>56</sup> SWAC Secretariat, December 2003, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Kenefick and Conte, June 2003, p. 31.

### 3.9 Armed criminality

Armed criminality was rife during the conflict with all combatants using the power of the gun to rob individuals, groups, and plunder the state. The only real protection offered in terms of preserving property or livelihoods in much of the country was possession of guns or being part of a group that was armed. Many individuals lost their homes and possessions through armed robbery and were impoverished – a state that many have yet to recover from, and indeed may be unable to do so. However, post-conflict armed robbery is comparatively low, although it is known that in Freetown from time-to-time armed robbers attack houses to steal electronic goods and valuables. However, according to an interviewee in the RSLAF, who had been on a number of sweeps with the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), he was unaware of any fatality through armed robbery in the capital – they were mainly used to frighten householders into compliance, rather than kill.<sup>58</sup>

Reliable data on SALW shootings is not available. However, the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Programme (CCSSP) had not noted a discernable increase in armed criminality in Freetown, for example.<sup>59</sup> There were reports of armed robbery in Bo, but interviewees were divided over whether armed violence had risen in comparison to pre-conflict levels. There was anecdotal evidence that drugs offences and property crimes were rising.<sup>60</sup>

The availability, or potential availability, of small arms remains a matter of concern. Illicit weapons seized during the conflict remain unaccounted for. Although special attention was given to the recovery of weapons formerly seized by combatants from UNAMSIL and ECOMOG during the conflict, and also those provided by the UK government to the GoSL, it is believed that many of these latter high-quality weapons were in 2003 still hidden in Sierra Leone or had crossed into neighbouring countries.<sup>61</sup> The whereabouts of weapons seized from the hostage-taking of UNAMSIL personnel remains speculative.<sup>62</sup> Further, the number of small arms in West Africa is estimated to be between 7-8m: a potential resource for armed robbery and violence.<sup>63</sup>

However, one positive impact of the conflict has been that SALW violence during the conflict in Sierra Leone has led to a general aversion to SALW display and possession rather than a 'macho' gun culture post-conflict as in many other countries. Guns are not openly on display or in widespread use (although it was reported during field research that guns could be bought in markets down country). Further, there were reports in areas where arms for development (AfD) programmes had been instituted, that people were experiencing psychological relief from the trauma of gun usage incurred during the conflict. People can now sleep at night and feel more confident it was reported in Ribbi and Kholifa Rowalla. The absence of SALW has further allowed people to move freely at night, to go to school, and lorries and other vehicles move freely now, it is said.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Confidential interview.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Ian MacDonald, CCSSP, Freetown, May 2004.

<sup>60</sup> Interviews with law and order officials and civilians in Freetown and Bo, May-June 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Eisele, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Eisele, 2003, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Stohl, 20 May 2004, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Lohead and Greene, March/April 2004, p. 16.

### 3.9.1 Current availability

Although it is widely suspected arms caches exist in Sierra Leone their location is uncertain. Many SALW, unless stored properly, will have severely deteriorated over the past two years since the ending of the civil conflict.

Cross-border movements of SALW are highly likely due to poor border security and controls, but the extent of the problem is unknown due to a lack of reliable data. Movement of SALW is more likely to be out of Sierra Leone than in as demand for weapons in Liberia and other West African counties is higher than in Sierra Leone. The fact that weapons can be traded in as part of DDR programmes in Liberia (for US\$300) and Cote d'Ivoire has led to an exiting of some weapons and ex-combatants from Sierra Leone.

Further, there appears to be some regional variations in SALW possession and availability across Sierra Leone and the potential for armed violence. There is demand for hunting weapons, for example, in some areas although AfD programmes have sought to facilitate the handing of these in. The delayed return of such weapons following licensing arrangements has caused some tensions.

And in districts bordering Guinea and Liberia in the east, continuing fears of cross-border instabilities and the UNAMSIL draw-down, combined with doubts regarding the capability of the RSLAF and SLP to maintain security, have the potential to fuel demand for SALW.

Ex-RUF are thought to have hidden weapons and may seek to retrieve them, or secure weapons from neighbouring countries, if insecurity grows and ex-CDF may do likewise. Port Loko and the West seems more stable than the east and most weapons seem to have been collected.

#### *Poverty impacts:*

- Armed robbery and violence were high during the conflict as many combatants lived off the land and were not restrained by their commanders from stealing or abusing civilians. Further, a goal of fighting was to plunder and all parties used robbery to sustain their capacity to fight, which impoverished civilians.
- The use and possession of SALW during the conflict has perhaps surprisingly not led to surges in post-conflict armed violence, unlike many other conflicts, and despite rising poverty. Key factors explaining this may include a reaction and revulsion to armed violence in Sierra Leone and the open display of weapons, and also the presence of international military forces and a strengthened police force. There is no evidence that civilians are being significantly additionally or newly impoverished by armed violence and robbery in the post-conflict period. What does appear to be negative is a creeping concern about security in some districts where drugs and anti-social behaviour are increasing. And the possibilities of outbreaks of armed robbery and violence by impoverished individuals cannot be ruled out in the future.

#### **4. Implications for aid programming**

Sierra Leone has been the recipient of considerable post-conflict programming. First, developmental programming has sought to address some of the root causes and problems that have been identified as contributing to various groups taking up SALW and armed violence. This has included, for example, programming seeking to improve the position of youths in society, and also programming addressing governance issues. It has further embraced post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) programmes that seek to transform the security sector and, in particular, the army, which committed armed violence against civilians and failed at certain points to protect civilians from armed violence. The UK, for example, the major donor in Sierra Leone, in addition to SSR has supported media development, law development, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the Sierra Leone Infrastructure Reconstruction Programme (SLIRP), the Chiefdom Governance Reform programme, civil society capacity strengthening through support to organisations such as the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), support for salaries in key social and security services, technical support to elections, the Governance Reform Secretariat Project, and humanitarian assistance. Support in macro-economics, food security, governance, refugee resettlement and the training and education of ex-combatants has been provided by other donors, such as the European Union (EU), and a multitude of INGO/NGOs. Other donors, such as the USA, Japan, China and Germany, have also instituted developmental programming.

The second cluster of programming revolves around DDR and SALW programming – some of which was instituted during, as well as after, the conflict – and which have sought to deal with weapons possession and remove SALW from society as well as reintegrating ex-combatants.

##### **4.1 DDR and SALW programming**

There were three phases of ‘formal’ DDR between 1998 and 2002. These phases suffered severe setbacks at many stages, including resurreptions of armed violence, and it was not until the closing stages of DDR in 2001 that SALW possession and armed violence was finally reined in. During much of the DDR process communities continued to suffer from high levels of insecurity with continuing impacts upon poverty.

Phase I was initiated with the return of President Kabbah to Freetown in February 1998 and attempted to frame a peace agreement that included DDR. DDR lasted between September and December 1998. It applied to all persons in any of the armed groups that participated in the conflict following the May 1997 coup. It targeted about 75,000 combatants including 55,000 CDF, 10,000 ex-SLA and AFRC, 7,000 RUF, 3,000 child combatants and 300 disabled.<sup>65</sup> After the establishment of the government DDR body, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR), the programme was further reviewed in July 1998, and targeted a considerably smaller number of ex-combatants – about 45,000.

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<sup>65</sup> Zongwe, 6 April 2002, p. 2.

However, only about 3,200 combatants were disarmed and these were mainly ex-SLA/AFRC who surrendered to ECOMOG. With the conflict escalating and RUF attacks on Freetown in January 1999, DDR become increasingly difficult.

DDR Phase II was part of the Lomé Peace agreement signed on 7 July 1999. It made provision for the disarmament of all combatants and paramilitary groups. UNAMSIL succeeded ECOMOG with a mandate to disarm combatants.<sup>66</sup> Following a review and redesign of the DDR programme, as part of a multi-donor initiative, five demobilisation components were set up and reinsertion packages were initiated including a transitional safety allowance (TSA) of about US\$300 in two payments for combatants. A total of 18,898 persons were disarmed, but once again DDR was interrupted by the resumption of fighting in May 2000 and the re-arming of many ex-combatants and the suspension of the TSA.<sup>67</sup> Subsequently, in an interim phase, some limited disarmament took place of 2,600 combatants, but it was not until 2001 that more comprehensive DDR took place.

Phase III lasted from 18 May 2001 until 6 January 2002. Agreement was reached on 2 May 2001 between the RUF and the GoSL to resume disarmament and a ceasefire was signed in Abuja. Almost 75,000 people registered as ex-combatants at DDR camps from 1998 onwards, and 60% were processed between May 2001 and January 2002, when the conflict was officially declared over.

However, there were clear gaps in DDR programming in terms of the comprehensiveness of weapons collection, the effective targeting and reintegration of ex-combatants into communities, and concerns regarding the sustainability of community development. New follow-up programming was initiated to address these gaps, for example:

- DFID assisted the NCDDR with the Community Reintegration Programme (CRP);
- UNDP/UNAMSIL with the Human Security Fund and Stopgaps;
- GTZ and USAID with support to the Reintegration Opportunities Programme (ROP).

The Stopgap Programme, which commenced in October 2001, in particular attempted to address time lags that ex-combatants were experiencing in receiving their reintegration benefits, especially in the east bordering Liberia. These delays led to volatility among concentrations of ex-combatants. Stopgap Programmes provided short-term labour intensive engagement working with the rehabilitation of vital community infrastructure. By June 2003, 69 Stopgap projects had been approved with a total commitment of US\$844,000.<sup>68</sup>

The social impact of Stopgaps was described as considerable with ex-combatants working side-by-side with community members, rehabilitating community infrastructure and agricultural land, which they had often destroyed or pillaged themselves. Civilians and community members were said to have benefited from a rekindling of community camaraderie and a softening of mindsets opening

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<sup>66</sup> Zongwe, 6 April 2002, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Zongwe, 6 April 2002, p. 2-3.

<sup>68</sup> UNAMSIL, August 2003, p. 8.

possibilities for healing and reconciliation. Further, the programme helped rehabilitate infrastructure including health centres, schools, water systems, and garbage collection. Following the official closure of the DDR programme run by NCDDR and the SLP in January 2002, the Community Arms Collection and Destruction (CACD) Programme was set up to address shortfalls and shortcomings in the process.<sup>69</sup> While the DDR process had collected around 70,000 arms it left undetermined numbers of ex-combatants unregistered and without benefits.

Further, CDF fighters who armed themselves (in other words, were not officially armed by the CDF) were excluded from the process, causing considerable resentments. And weapons uncollected in Sierra Leone were being used for armed violence, especially armed robbery.<sup>70</sup> In response to this, the CACD programme was initiated in mid-2002 and collected more than 9,000 weapons. Ex-combatants choose the community they wanted to return to and were eligible for the ROP which was anticipated as giving them vocational skills training, a formal education, and entrepreneurial support in the areas of fisheries and agriculture over a six-month period with a limited allowance and toolkit. However, there were considerable delays which triggered the UNAMSIL Stopgap Programme referred to above.

CACD II had a voluntary disarmament community approach. It did not give direct incentives for arms to avoid problems of fraudulent weapons and the development of weapons as monetary assets.<sup>71</sup> The programme aimed to promote a mindset in which people abandoned weapons ownership for a 'weapons-free-environment'. As an incentive to ex-combatants and communities, chiefdoms were allocated US\$20,000 for development projects once they were weapons-free. Key elements of the programme included:

- Sensitisation of chiefdom communities and social mobilization against SALW;
- SALW drop-off areas for people who wanted to hand-in residual weapons in the community;
- House-to-house searches by the SLP to confirm whether a chiefdom was weapons-free;
- A participatory approach which permitted the whole community to determine and prioritise developmental needs.<sup>72</sup>

In tandem with the above programmes, other initiatives such as GTZ's ReAct (Rehabilitation, Reconciliation and Reintegration Activities) Programme and the CRP were undertaken.

## 4.2 Constraints in programming

Fault-lines are apparent in some of this programming. First, weapons collection during the conflict broke down and the various parties charged with implementing it were unable to develop a secure environment within which combatants could be disarmed or weapons handed in. It was only at the tail end of 2001 that disarmament

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<sup>69</sup> See: UNDP (undated), 'Sierra Leone: Community Arms Collection and Development Programme'.

<sup>70</sup> Lochhead and Greene, March/April 2004, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Lochhead and Greene, March/April 2004, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Lochhead and Greene, March/April 2004, pp. 10-11.

became more comprehensive. Large numbers of weapons were hidden or exited Sierra Leone. An interviewee within the security services estimated that virtually all ex-combatants either had weapons hidden (mainly in their homes) or could readily access them through caches or from neighbouring countries where they are freely available. The potential consequence of this is that if poverty continues to deepen, the government remains corrupt, and dissatisfaction breaks out among ex-combatants, a re-run of armed violence would be a distinct possibility.

Second, programming has yet to fully grapple with the problem of SALW from a regional perspective. Arms embargoes were ineffective and were circumvented by adjoining countries to Sierra Leone on a regular basis.<sup>73</sup> The RSLAF and the SLP are meant to have a role in policing Sierra Leone's borders, but do not have the capacity to do so effectively, despite SSR which has had some impact on transforming them into more capable and professional forces. It is suspected that there is bribery at border customs areas and many border crossings are open. Further, parts of the Sierra Leone/Liberia border are covered by jungle and the many paths that cross the border cannot be monitored. Civilians report that lorries regularly pass through borders that are loaded, it is suspected, with SALW, as well as drugs, diamonds and other valuable resources.<sup>74</sup>

Third, the targeting of ex-combatants to bring them into civilian life has been incomplete and misdirected in some areas of programming. In order to create a secure environment within which development can take place it is critical that ex-combatants do not return to the gun. However, ex-combatants, particularly civilians in the CDF, were not incorporated into the disarmament process and have not been reintegrated or received reintegration benefits. This may not seem to be of major concern as many CDF fighters remained in their communities during and after the conflict and thus theoretically did not need to be reintegrated. But in places such as Bo Town, former Kamajor officers remain without worthwhile livelihoods or are impoverished and are now receiving no assistance. The former CDF which regards themselves as playing a major part in the defeat of the RUF and the protection of civilians from attacks, have the capacity to return to conflict or destabilise the government.

Further, some RUF officers did not take up reintegration benefits and were impoverished and there are potential ex-combatant Sierra Leonean returnees scattered across West Africa.

Many ex-combatants, particularly those in the RUF, were unwilling or unable to rejoin rural communities engaged in smallholdings agriculture. And some donors were reluctant to commit funds for vocational training when there was a danger that ex-combatants might take the money and then return to fighting.<sup>75</sup> The closing date for registering for reintegration opportunities was June 2002 but it believed that only 60% of verified ex-combatants actually registered for reintegration opportunities.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> UN embargoes were imposed on Liberia in 1992 and on Sierra Leone in 1997. The latter was changed to apply to only rebel forces in 1998. Human Rights Watch, May 2000, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> Interviews conducted in Sierra Leone, May-June 2004.

<sup>75</sup> Fanthorpe, February 2003, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Fanthorpe, February 2003, p. 13 and p. 7.

Bridging the gap between combatants and communities remains a problem area. The CRP, React, Stopgaps, and the WfD programmes represent useful attempts to deal with the problem of getting ex-combatants and civilians working together and putting aside past differences, as well as mopping up some remaining civilian-held weapons in communities. However, there are still areas of Sierra Leone where this programming does not extend and where the sometimes misdirected reintegration efforts initiated during the 'formal' DDR process are still being felt. RUF, for example, were sent to areas where they had no family connections and skills training was sometimes directed towards areas where a needs assessment would have shown that there was no demand. It is not clear that alternatives to violence have been created for the majority of ex-combatants, many of whom saw taking up arms and joining armed groups as a way of surviving or enriching themselves. Ex-combatants are also among the poorest groups – a potentially worrying situation.

It was noted in 2002 that:

although it is easy to be critical, there is no doubt that the donor driven rush to 'process' ex-combatants through the DDR scheme has taken little account of the differing training needs and *de facto* reintegration opportunities of a socially complex population of former fighters.<sup>77</sup>

Fourth, vulnerable groups which have been victims of armed violence have not been adequately catered for in programming and many of them continue to slide deeper into poverty. A criticism of DDR was that combatants' dependents were not catered for during demobilisation and child soldiers, many of whom were abducted or forced to fight, after some initial programming, have reached the stage where they are still not reintegrated into civilian life, but mainstream child soldier programming has been run down.

And groups such as women forced into prostitution, child beggars, and street children, and the disabled, are becoming more impoverished in the worsening economic situation in Sierra Leone. Women were particularly neglected in the DDR process in Sierra Leone and there was also a low participation rate of 5% of women in the Stopgap programme, although steps were taken to address this.<sup>78</sup> Wives of ex-combatants were excluded from NCDDR programmes. Future reintegration support initiatives need to consider more the psycho-social support needs of women including female ex-combatants, wives and female victims of war. Also, specialist programmes are required to provide economic, physical and psychological support to help young bush wives return to normal life.<sup>79</sup> The parties to the conflict often did not disclose the presence of girls and child soldiers in their forces, for example, excluding them from DDR and complicating post-conflict attempts to redress the balance. Further, children were not consulted in programme design and delivery, including their needs and priorities.

Fifth, as mentioned above, a key impact of usage has been the psychological and social trauma of SALW possession/usage. Little seems to have been done to address this outside some services given to ex-combatants. This is by no means

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<sup>77</sup> Fanthorpe, February 2003, p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> The Stopgap Program, October 2001, p. 15.

<sup>79</sup> UNAMSIL, August 2003, p. 25.

straightforward given the huge numbers of people affected by trauma. Almost all interviewees from chiefs, down through district officials, to people working in NGOs and civilians without livelihoods, openly admitted to being traumatised. Virtually every extended family in Sierra Leone has experienced a death or physical injury as a result of armed violence. Traditional healing ceremonies have had some impact in terms of forgiveness and reintegration of some ex-combatants but civilians appear to have been left largely unaided to deal with the psychological consequences of armed violence which has left many unable to work or to press ahead and alleviate their poverty.

Sixth, it is not evident that DDR and SALW and related programming has fully created the sustainable conditions for security as a precursor of development. With so many guns potentially in circulation, and ex-combatants neither fully accepted by the communities they have returned to (in the case of the RUF), and with many becoming increasingly impoverished, and SALW freely available, DDR and SALW programming, whatever its contribution to stabilising the situation, has not necessarily created sustainable security. The SLP have begun to play a part in confidence-building and have become less corrupt and more accountable, but the army remains an area of concern and is still not trusted by much of the population. It is questionable whether the 'vulnerable' in society – those without guns during the civil war for example – have been empowered over those who accrued powers such as militia leaders and officers in the various factions.

For future violence to be averted, there needs to be stronger regional controls of weapons flows into Sierra Leone and strong measures taken to avert poverty and a resort to SALW as a livelihood provider, or as a means of robbing the population and exploiting natural resources. However, collecting the domestically-hidden SALW in Sierra Leone remains difficult when many believe violence might break out again and some are consequently ensuring they have ready access to weapons for this eventuality.

Last, addressing the root causes of conflict and the need, or perceived need, to resort to SALW and armed violence, remains a highly problematic undertaking. Donors have funded programmes to address the youth issue, good governance, justice, mineral and resource exploitation, to single out by a few, but notwithstanding these, many of the triggers of armed violence remain. The reform of traditional community structures remains a pressing need. Although the position of traditional authority, particularly in places like Freetown, has been eroded, in the countryside this is less so. Discontent, or even violence, particularly directed by youths, who see traditional authority figures securing resources and wealth, cannot be discounted. Nor can further violent protests be ruled out against the government, which is widely seen as not fulfilling expectations that a new less corrupt and equitable era was unfolding in 2002.

Overall, programming in Sierra Leone seems to have been directed at the right kind of targets, although the delivery of some programming has been tardy, but it is not well-resourced or long-term enough (even though it is large by the standards of resources usually directed at Africa) to fully reverse conflict impacts on poverty and remains potentially vulnerable to being undermined by a return to armed violence. Further, the psychological and social changes engendered by SALW usage and armed violence may have been under-estimated, although they are admittedly difficult to reverse and

need a long-term commitment. The contribution that local actors, particularly NGOs, can make in reversing armed violence impacts has also been under-utilised.

## 5. Conclusions

### Key points from research findings

- ❑ SALW possession enabled the rebels to sustain a campaign of terror, killings, and robbery against civilians and the state. SALW enabled them to intimidate, offered increased lethality, and suited their ambush and hit-and-run tactics. Communities were deeply damaged by chronic insecurity and cycles of violence which damaged social capital and compelled many to flee. These impacts are still being felt two years after the ending of the conflict.
- ❑ Conversely, much armed violence within Sierra Leone was not committed with SALW. Many atrocities in Sierra Leone, and particularly the ones designed to have maximum psychological impact (such as amputations and mutilation) were committed with traditional weapons or other instruments or implements. Further, the CDF managed to make a major contribution to defeating the RUF fighting with only limited SALW.
- ❑ SALW-induced insecurity contributed significantly in direct and indirect ways to impoverishment. First, SALW possession enabled rebels to destroy infrastructure and social services thus damaging the health and livelihoods of much of the population. Second, they forced civilians to flee at gunpoint from rural and urban areas and abandon their possessions and their occupations. Most have not been able to return to the same level of income they had before the conflict. Third, social capital was damaged by SALW violence both in cities and the countryside with the result that traditional solidarities have been damaged weakening the capacity of Sierra Leone to recover. Psychological trauma following gun use is widespread across Sierra Leone, both in combatants and non-combatants. Fourth, transportation and trading patterns were altered by armed violence directed at lorry drivers. Although there has been a degree of recovery, trade has not returned to pre-conflict levels thus contributing to a general impoverishment. Fifth, vulnerable groups have suffered disproportionately from the impact of armed violence.
- ❑ It is difficult to disentangle precisely the impact of SALW, as opposed to armed violence generally, on poverty due to a lack of data and the fact that other variables impact upon poverty, such as poor governance, lack of justice, and corruption. Some of the findings here are inferred, although direct evidence through interviewing and data was also amassed.
- ❑ In terms of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ from SALW possession during the civil conflict, it is clear that the majority of people have been impoverished by their direct and indirect impacts. Most combatants were poorer at the conclusion of the conflict than they had been at the beginning, and are even poorer now. Most ex-combatants are now unemployed. Similarly, the poor have become poorer and large numbers of professional people have seen their incomes shrink to a much lower level than before the war. Vulnerable groups, including women, were particularly targeted by combatants for abuse and their position has worsened in terms of impoverishment following the conflict. The main ‘winners’ in terms of enriching themselves have been people in positions of power in the government, the army, and those with connections with them, those engaged in the exploitation

of economic resources, and to a lesser extent those who had high level rebel connections. Members of the various coups are known to have amassed riches, and many government ministers and officials are thought to have considerable incomes outside their official ones. Business persons dealing in diamonds and mineral resources are known to have enriched themselves during the conflict and subsequently. In almost all these cases, armed violence enabled them and family/group members to cash in. The realisation that this is the case and that corruption is continuing amongst those in hierarchies is causing considerable resentment and could easily be a trigger for future outbursts of armed violence.

- In Spring 2005, over three years after the official ending of the conflict, the main challenge is probably not dealing with the impacts of armed violence, although these are substantial, or even in curbing SALW. The main challenge is addressing the growing perceptions of much of the population that the authorities and elites are failing to turn their back on the corruption of the past and have little empathy for the welfare of much of the population, who are becoming more impoverished, or in building a more equitable Sierra Leone. In 2002, there was considerable hope that a new more equitable era had dawned. When these failed expectations are combined with considerable rises in rice prices over the past few years, drastic rises in petrol prices in March 2005,<sup>80</sup> and the non-availability of mains water, and cut backs in electricity supplies, at a time when the international community is continuing to invest extremely heavily in Sierra Leone, many people are coming to the conclusion that the system, or at least the present government, may be unreformable. This opens up the possibility of a degree of popular backing for 'unconstitutional' action. Increasingly, segments of the population have been comparing the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP)-led government to the All Peoples Congress (APC) authoritarian regime and reminiscing about the NPRC regime. When UNAMSIL leaves Sierra Leone there are considerable concerns regarding violence directed against the state.
- The potential for armed violence in the short-medium term points to the need for monitoring of SALW flows internally and across borders, and in relation to returning combatants from West Africa. It also draws attention to the need to continue to press ahead with security sector reform in the military and police to avoid misuse of SALW and disproportionate use of force against civilians. The recent incident when police fired upon demonstrators suggests further work may be required in terms of police training. The RSLAF did not become involved in the above incident.
- 'Positive' unintended impacts that emerged in the aftermath of armed violence include among elements of civil society: a societal aversion to weapons usage, possession and display and a desire, if possible, to avoid another catastrophic outbreak of armed violence; a new awareness of human rights including gender rights; a growth of local NGOs; and among some a rejection of, or desire to reform, traditional inequities in power and resources; and, finally, a desire to hold the government and army to account for abuses committed during the conflict. However, there are few signs that these dynamics have been harnessed to materially improve the position of the poor or those who have become more impoverished.

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<sup>80</sup> In mid-March 2005 petrol prices in Freetown had virtually doubled on the black market in days as a result of the non-availability of petrol through official channels. On 14 March, petrol was selling at around £3 a gallon on the black market.

## Responding to SALW possession/usage

The experience of Sierra Leone suggests that the following elements may usefully be integrated into future programming that takes armed violence into account:

- ❑ *Community security and confidence-building.* Unprotected communities particularly suffered the consequences of SALW and were impoverished. This implies the need for appropriately trained police and army contingents (through SSR) that fulfil their duty to protect civilians and communities.
- ❑ *International/regional SALW controls.* Improved international and regional controls over licit and illicit arms transfers to conflict zones.
- ❑ *National legislation/regulations on SALW.* Further measures are required in this area to ensure that controls on small arms keep in check potentially rising levels of arms criminality and outbreaks of armed violence.
- ❑ *Comprehensive regional/localised arms collection.* The latter needs to particularly target civilian weapons. Regionally co-ordinated arms collection programmes are vital to avert the intensification or potential resurgence of armed violence through intra-regional arms circulations.
- ❑ *Improved border patrols to combat illicit trafficking of SALW.*
- ❑ *More targeted interventions to secure livelihoods for ex-combatants.* Opportunities/needs assessments are particularly important in relation to this to avoid the poor targeting that has sometimes been associated with DDR.
- ❑ *Build upon civil society capacities to reverse gun cultures and the militarization of communities/societies.* Civil society and locals have the best understanding of how armed violence comes about and the capacity to engage with it through traditional mechanisms. This needs to be built upon. In Sierra Leone, community re-acceptance of ex-combatants has been relatively high, despite the atrocities that have been committed. DDR and other forms of programming still do not fully engage with the capacities of locals to reverse the militarization of communities, although AfD programming is making progress in this area.
- ❑ *Identify and target vulnerable groups.* Vulnerable groups such as the disabled, children, and women were not adequately provided for in much DDR and associated programming. They continue to be disadvantaged three years after the ending of the conflict. They continue to be disadvantaged three years after the ending of the conflict and need continuing or further support.
- ❑ *Root causes of weapons acquisition need to be addressed.* Sierra Leone shows that the targeting of conflict triggers, such as poor governance, corruption, and exclusion, are vital if an increasing demand for SALW is not to emerge some time in the future. This may take the form of SALW acquisition for armed robbery as poverty rises, or arms acquisition for protection purposes, or to further political objectives.
- ❑ *Poverty issues.* A major priority is addressing the increasing poverty in Sierra Leone in order to prevent potential outbreaks of popular discontent and armed violence. One lesson that emerges from Sierra Leone is that prioritising poverty reduction during DDR/SALW programming is essential to assist in preventing individuals such as ex-combatants becoming recruits to future armed violence.
- ❑ *Linking security and development.* In Sierra Leone, as in other post-conflict contexts, there was a lack of connection between the security and developmental components of DDR. SALW programming, such as AfD programmes, have

addressed some of those gaps but the need to strengthen these linkages is paramount in armed violence and poverty programming.

- *Promoting participatory programming.* In Sierra Leone, much SALW/DDR and other programming has typically been externally-driven. This has contributed to the government failing to take responsibility and ownership for taking Sierra Leone forward in addressing armed violence and poverty issues, preferring to rely instead on the interventions of the international community. Sierra Leone institutions have not generally proved effective in taking the lead on this. Nevertheless, participatory programming is vital as international donors and international organisations will not remain in Sierra Leone indefinitely. Civil society organisations may give an entry point to enhance participatory programming, along the lines suggested above.

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